

Good Stories for Children

By Walt McDougall

THE AMAZING ADVENTURES OF THEODORE GINKS, WHO FOUND THE BELT THAT MADE HERCULES STRONG

SUPPOSE every boy and girl has heard of Hercules, that Greek hero who was the very strongest man in the world in ancient times, but I imagine that few know what became of him at last. He did so many wonderful deeds that all the world rang with his praises, but all of a sudden he disappeared and was never heard of again. He was known to have traveled all over Europe, Asia and Africa, but it wasn't known that finally he came to America, by wading across Behring's Strait, and explored all of our country and thought it the finest of all.

One day he went to sleep in a cave in Kentucky, and a strange beverage called "Gourmashyrie," a drink made by the Kentucky Indians that will put the strongest man asleep in a few hours, and when he awoke he discovered that his Thimble Belt, Hercules' famous Belt of Strength, had been stolen. He was so angry that he went to the office of the conductor and explained it, or they'll make me pay for the damage."

He wandered all over seeking for his belt, but he was so ashamed of himself that he didn't let anyone know who he was, and finally the world concluded that he had died. Nobody knew where he went, but he simply went roaming all over, making his living as he could and hoping that some day he would recover his belt and again be the strongest man in all the world. One day a boy named Theodore Ginks found the belt.

Theodore lived in the country and went to school in the village of Hominy Hill. He had to walk about seven miles to and from his school every day, and he was well known that he was glad when Saturday came. On Saturday he went after blackberries with Theodosia Pickering, a little girl who lived next door and of whom he was very fond. They had climbed a low hill covered with great boulders where the berries were plentiful, when Theodore discovered a hole under the rocks. It looked like a fox's den, and he dug away the earth until he could crawl in. Then he saw that there was quite a large cave beyond, and making a torch of dry grass he explored it. At the extreme end he came upon a bow, a tomahawk, some arrows and a brass belt, all covered with metal plates, rusted and mouldy with age. He put the belt around his waist, winding it twice around his chest, and he felt good all the time.

On the way home, however, he had an adventure that developed the fact that whoever wore the belt became another Hercules. As they passed through Horrible Hollow, a dark and dreary ravine where the road was shaded by great trees and rocks, they met "Tin-Can" Murphy, one of the most disreputable tramps in Keno County and a tramp from whom all other hoboes fled in great fear, for he was simply fierce.

He never worked, for he was too strong. He could bend an iron bar like straw and straighten out a horseshoe between his finger and thumb, and he was very proud of his great strength. He glared at the children and the berries they carried, and he had gathered. Theodore was about to give them up to him, but the tramp said he must have a kiss from sweet little Theodosia and that made the boy's blood boil. As Tin-Can was about to take a kiss from Theodosia, he raised his fist and struck her an awful blow on the side of the head.

A Terrible Punch

Of course, the boy only thought to stop the tramp for a moment, for he knew that he was a bad man and he fully expected to be almost murdered by his tenacity, but to his amazement the blow sent Tin-Can Murphy soaring through the air for nearly a mile. Over the tree-tops he sailed, turning somersaults like a tumbler pigeon, yelling "Foul! Foul!" all the time, and he would certainly have broken his neck had he not landed in a deep swamp where he spent an hour pulling himself out of the mud while he wondered whether it was a cyclone or a volcano that had hit him.

Of course Theodore was as much amazed as Murphy was, and the fact that he had so effectually disposed of the tramp didn't make him feel assured that he would not return at once and take revenge for the blow. He had heard him crying "Foul!" and thought he would demand satisfaction, so he hurried Theodosia away as fast as he could go, and to his surprise he walked the five miles to his home in five minutes. Even that didn't make him suspect that it was the belt that was doing it, but he thought he must be dreaming. No sooner had he reached home than his father gave him ten cents and told him to take the trolley to Bartown, ten miles away, to get the doctor, as his mother had been taken ill suddenly while chopping wood. His father thought it was because the axe was too heavy, and he thought he would buy a lighter one in the fall.

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"What kind of a car have they given me?" he cried, and wrenched at the iron rail, but it was as firm as ever. He stopped the car and the motorman came back to look at things.

"It's the poor iron they use," said he, after he had inspected the broken rail.

"Pull that bell," said the conductor to Theodore, and the boy obeyed, but not only the leather strap but even the bell came off in his hands.

"This car's rotten!" cried the conductor.

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"The idea!" retorted the big man. "A kid like you doing that! It's because they put poor material into things nowadays. I suppose you think you could do it again!"

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"Are you going looney?" said one of the policemen, looking at the car. "How could that kid put a car out of shape like that?"

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